

BOOK NOTICE

Living Earth. By Peter Farb. Harper & Brothers, New York, 1959. $5\frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ inches, illustrated, 178 pp., \$3.75.

Peter Farb has undertaken the task of compressing the living element of the earth's crust into a book of 178 pages, and he has done a thoroughly creditable job. This little book's unbroken theme is the multitude of living forms and countless individuals inhabiting the soil, and that these living creatures are responsible for the character of the soil in no small degree. After a general review of the processes of soil formation and the part played by the lower organisms in this formation, the book broadly covers three great soil types. The characteristic differences and the types of life associations found in the forest, grassland, and desert soils are presented. Some representative soil dwellers, from bacteriophages through plants, insects, and burrowing mammals are given in typical locales. A fair balance between plant and animal life has been maintained, and a considerable portion of the book deals with the fascinating world of microorganisms inhabiting the earth's crust. The lives of soil inhabiting insects and their near relatives are interwoven throughout, constituting perhaps a third of the subject matter. An especially commendable feature of the work is a strong emphasis on ecology and mutualism in the various soil societies.

The book is unusually readable and interest sustaining, while adhering closely to the facts of the several scientific specialties involved. The seventeen halftone illustrations by Roman Vishniac are considerably superior to the usual printed rendition. A number of illustrative line drawings by Louise Katz are included. Aside from the obvious stimulation to the imagination and understanding of the younger reader, the more mature professional scientist can profit by an evening or so with such a book. We all become somewhat encysted in our specialties, and it is refreshing to occasionally broadly review the complex interrelationships of life we tend to forget.—E. E. McCoy, Jr.